

THE MEN WHO MADE THE NFPA

At the beginning of our story are two essentials of the modern universe: water and electricity. Although it's generally considered wise to separate the two, they're brought together here by another essential of our universe: fire.

The men who brought them together were a visionary breed. Some, such as Thomas Alva Edison, are well-known to history. Others, such as John Ripley Freeman and William Merrill, are not. But all of them were instrumental in the founding of the National Fire Protection Association.

Fortunately, much of Freeman's work is well-documented, so let's start our story with him.

**The beginnings of the
100-year-old legacy
of advancing
fire protection**

**John Ripley
Freeman of
Factory Mutual
and, later, the
Manufacturers
Mutual Fire
Insurance
Company.**



**So many
sprinklers,
so little
standard-
ization**

John Freeman was born on July 27, 1855, in West Bridgton, Maine, and graduated

from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1876. He joined the Factory Mutual Inspection Department in 1886 and spent the next 10 years reshaping the company's approach to fire protection.

By this time, sprinklers had already proven effective for controlling fires in large mercantile properties, and there were a number on the market, including the Mackey from 1887, the early Grinnells, the Kane and the Neracher from 1888, the New York from 1889, the Harkness from 1890, the Buell from 1892, and the National.

John Freeman would have had various tools at his disposal to assess the effectiveness of these sprinklers, including an 1884 report generated by C. J. H. Woodbury, chief engineer of the Factory Mutual Fire Insurance Companies. Woodbury's report evaluated the response times of 15 different types of sprinklers after they underwent a gradual temperature buildup, followed by sudden immersion in steam.

Woodbury was also involved in another area that would soon present a major fire problem: electricity.

By establishing the Underwriters Electrical Bureau, Merrill had taken the first important step toward a unified approach to electrical technology. However, he believed that there was still work to do. Most important was the need for standards.

By the end of 1895, five distinct electrical codes existed in the United States, including the universal rules developed in 1890 by the National Electric Light Association. Other respected organizations developing codes included the National Board of Fire Underwriters and the Underwriters National Electric Association. The New York Board of Fire Underwriters

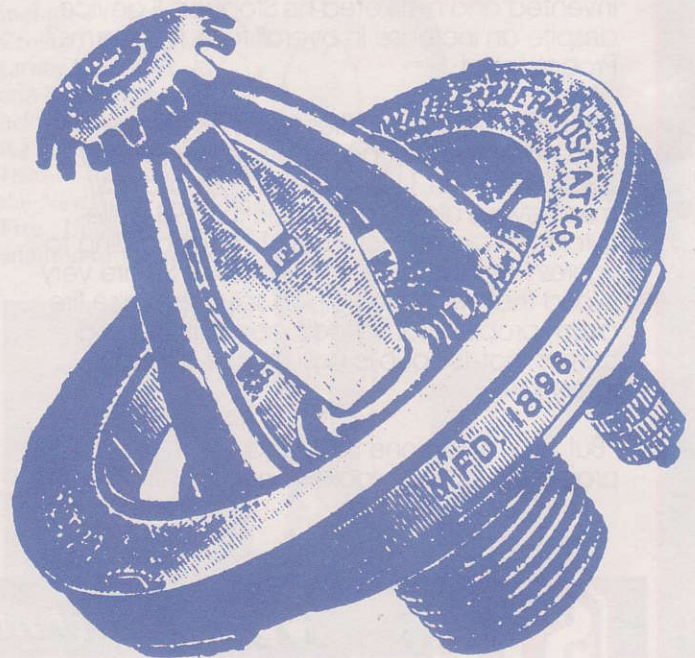
issued one of the earliest sets of installation rules in 1881, and the National Board adopted these in 1882. Clearly, consistency was needed in the blossoming electrical industry.

Building consensus

Consistency was also needed in the sprinkler industry. Early in 1895, at the Boston office of the Underwriters Board of New England, a handful of men, including John Freeman, gathered in Everett U. Crosby's office to talk about establishing consistent rules for sprinkler systems. Besides Crosby and Freeman, four other men attended. They were Everett's father, Uberto C. Crosby, chairman of the Factory Improvement Committee of the New England Fire Insurance Exchange; W. H. Stratton of the Factory Insurance Association, later renamed Industrial Risk Insurers; Frederick Grinnell of the Providence Steam and Gas Pipe Company, known today as Grinnell Fire Protection; and F. Eliot Cabot of the Boston Board of Fire Underwriters.

The group agreed that the immediate

**An early
sprinkler
design from
the 19th
century.**



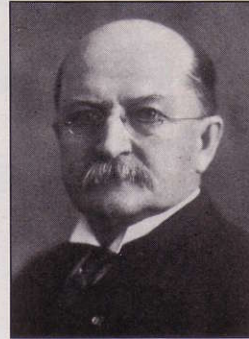
C. C. Little, NFPA's first president.



Uberto Crosby, NFPA's second president.



Charles A. Hexamer, NFPA's first vice president.



Everett Crosby, NFPA's first secretary.



problem was rooted in the success of fire protection sprinklers. With the technology's rising popularity came inconsistent installation methods, demonstrated by the existence of nine radically different standards for sprinkler pipe size and spacing within 100 miles of Boston.

This group met again with other stock fire underwriters in December 1895 in New York City. The momentum was starting to build, not only to create a consistent set of installation rules for sprinkler systems, but also to establish an association of some kind to administer them.

1896 and beyond

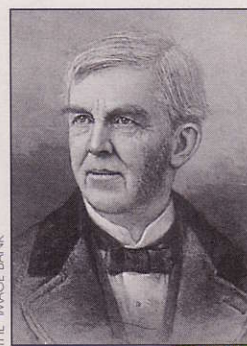
Back in the electrical community, five different codes meant five different sets of rules, significant confusion, and controversy. On a quest for solidarity, the Joint Conference of Electrical and Allied Interests met in New York on March 18, 1896. The participants discussed the five American codes, the German code, the code of the British Board of Trade, and the Phoenix Rules of England. Later, a committee chaired by Professor Francis B. Crocker of Columbia University selected the most suitable criteria from all the codes and printed a draft code that was sent for review to 1,200 people in North America and Europe.

The conference met again in May and June 1897 and established an electrical code that was unanimously approved as the *National Code*. Because it was so fair and broad, the National Board of Fire

Underwriters adopted it in lieu of its own codes, then issued it in 1897 as the *National Electrical Code*.

The day after the meeting of the electrical conference, another meeting was held in New York City. Instead of fire and electrical safety, the topics of this conference were fire, water, sprinklers, and the *Report of the Committee on Automatic Sprinkler Protection*, later to become NFPA 13, *Installation of Sprinkler Systems*.

The conferees, who included Uberto Crosby, Everett Crosby, W. Stratton, and F. Eliot Cabot, held another meeting on November 6, 1896 at the office of the New York Board of Fire Underwriters. In addition to the sprinkler



THE IMAGE BANK

Thomas Alva Edison championed electrical safety.



installation rules, the group reviewed 12 articles for a new association, to be known as the National Fire Protection Association.

Based on the report of a quickly assembled nominating committee, the original elected officers for of the NFPA were President C. C. Little, chair of the Underwriters Bureau of Middle and Southern States; Vice President S. F. Lawton, inspector for the South-Eastern Tariff Association; Secretary-Treasurer Everett U. Crosby, manager of the Underwriters Bureau of New England; and chair of the Executive Committee, Uberto C. Crosby, of the Factory Improvement Committee of the New England Insurance Exchange.

The NFPA's first president, C. C. Little, died a few months into his term. A year after the Association's founding, he was succeeded by Uberto Crosby. Charles A. Hexamer of the Philadelphia Fire Underwriters Association become vice president, Everett Crosby was elected secretary, and W. H. Stratton of the Factory Insurance Association become the chair of the Executive Committee. Their goal, according to Crosby, was "to bring together the experience of different sections and different bodies of underwriters, to come to a mutual understanding, and, if possible, an agreement on general principles governing fire protection, to harmonize and adjust our differences so that we may go before the public with uniform rules and conditions which may appeal to their judgment..."

The second of the 12 articles for the new Association stated that "membership shall consist of Stock Fire Insurance Organizations, and representatives of such



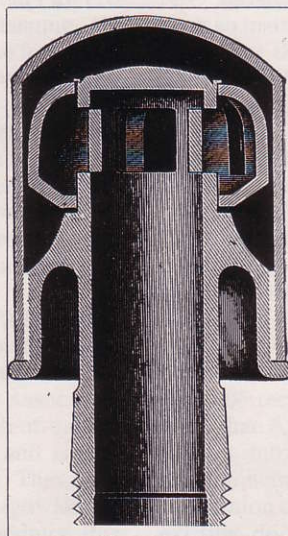
organizations, having charge of the improvement and inspection of risk." This article prohibited people like John Freeman and Frederick Grinnell, who had helped lay the groundwork for the Association, from joining.

Soon, however, the new NFPA, as it came to be called, began to open its rules to include others not previously eligible for active membership. These new members numbered more than 100 by 1902.

Other firsts

The organizations involved in the Association today include most of the organizations that were active in 1896 and 1897, with some name changes through the years based on mergers and realignments. The 20 original members of the National Fire Protection Association were the Board of Underwriters of Allegheny County; the Boston Board of Fire Underwriters; the Canadian Fire Underwriters Association; the Chicago Underwriters Association; the Cleveland Board of Underwriters; the Factory Insurance Association; the Improved Risk Commission, Chicago; the Insurance Association of Providence; the Middle States Inspection Bureau; the New England Insurance Exchange; the New Hampshire Board of Fire Underwriters; the New York Board of Fire Underwriters; the Philadelphia Fire Underwriters Association; the South-Eastern Tariff Association; the St. Louis Board of Underwriters; the Suburban Underwriters Association; the Underwriters Association of the Middle Department; the Underwriters Bureau of New England; the Underwriters Bureau Middle & Southern States; and the Western

Henry S. Parmelee and a cross section of the Parmelee 5 sprinkler head.



LETS

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William H. Merrill is best known today for establishing the Underwriters Laboratories (UL).



Factory Insurance Association.

In 1900, the National Board of Fire Underwriters (NBFU), now the American Insurance Association, joined the NFPA. NBFU voted "to adopt the stan-

dards formulated by the National Fire Protection Association, and assume the expense of publishing the same in suitable form." This publishing relationship continued until 1965.

Also in 1900, William Merrill finally became a member. He served the Association as its secretary-treasurer from 1903 to 1908 and as president from 1910 to 1911, forging a strong relationship between the two organizations that continues today.

The term "National" in NFPA may seem to imply a lack of international involvement. But this isn't so. In fact, the first overseas members joined the Association in 1903. They were John Smith of the Sun Insurance office in London, and George Smith from Sydney, Australia. They were soon followed by Nicolas Sergowsky, an insurance engineer in St. Petersburg, Russia, and others who were awakening to the virtues of the organization.

By 1904, the NFPA's active membership consisted of 38 stock fire insurance boards and 417 individuals, most of whom were related to the stock fire insurance organizations. However, the NFPA made another critical change in membership rules at its annual meeting that year and opened NFPA membership to numerous other groups.

The first organizations to join in 1904 as active members under the new rules were the Associated Factory Mutual Insurance Companies, the Factory Mutual Laboratories, and the National Electrical Contractors Association of the United States. They were soon followed by the American Insti-

tute of Architects, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, the American Water Works Association, and the International Association of Fire Engineers (Fire Chiefs). Russell Grinnell and a number of other sprinkler manufacturers and installers also joined NFPA in 1904.

The first fire department officer to join the NFPA was Battalion Chief W. T. Beggin of the New York City Fire Department, who became a member in March 1905. In the same month, H. D. Davis, the State Fire Marshal of Ohio, joined as the first State Fire Marshal. John Freeman, who had been so instrumental in gathering together the group that generated the motivation for the NFPA, finally became a member in January 1907.

The marriage of fire and water

In 1911, water and electricity combined when the NFPA was chosen to produce the *National Electrical Code*. Many other important documents have joined NFPA 13, *Installation of Sprinkler Systems*, and NFPA 70, *National Electrical Code*. In fact, the NFPA now produces almost 300 codes and standards, developed by more than 205 technical committees staffed by more than 5,000 volunteers.

Built into the codes- and standards-development and adoption process is the publication of calls for proposals to amend existing documents or on the proposed

Frederick Grinnell and his glass disk sprinkler head.

